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Abstract

The Pequot author William Apess is regarded as having almost miraculously transcended poverty, racism, and injustice to become an eloquent orator. Modern scholars have imagined the place of his birth as a primitive camp in the hills. Yet Colrain, in the early 1800s, was a bustling, religiously diverse, transcultural town where white (mostly Scots-Irish), Native American, and African American people routinely crossed paths, and where the Apess family routinely crossed color lines. Over time, Apess drew on his experiences among tribal, racial, and religious groups in multiple locales (Colchester, Colrain, Ledyard, Mashpee, Tyendinega, and elsewhere) to construct a compellingly romanticized (and colonized) version of indigenous identity. Onstage and in print, he was an iconic “poor Indian” and “son of the forest”; in person, he was a well-educated, cosmopolitan performer who loved the limelight and feared the wilderness. He evoked a precolonial ideal of a pristine Native life, while delivering trenchant critiques of white settler abuses; yet he advocated for religious conformity more than for indigenous survivance. Thus, to better contextualize Apess’ life and works, we need to critically and carefully consider nineteenth-century modes of identity formation, national affiliation, cultural performance, and racial tropes, including those articulated by Apess himself.

Disciplines

Anthropology | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Hill Town Touchstone

Reconsidering William Apess and Colrain, Massachusetts

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ABSTRACT The Pequot author William Apess is regarded as having almost miraculously transcended poverty, racism, and injustice to become an eloquent orator. Modern scholars have imagined the place of his birth as a primitive camp in the hills. Yet Colrain, in the early 1800s, was a bustling, religiously diverse, transcultural town where white (mostly Scots-Irish), Native American, and African American people routinely crossed paths, and where the Apess family routinely crossed color lines. Over time, Apess drew on his experiences among tribal, racial, and religious groups in multiple locales (Colchester, Colrain, Ledyard, Mashpee, Tyendinega, and elsewhere) to construct a compellingly romanticized (and colonized) version of indigenous identity. Onstage and in print, he was an iconic “poor Indian” and “son of the forest”; in person, he was a well-educated, cosmopolitan performer who loved the limelight and feared the wilderness. He evoked a precolonial ideal of a pristine Native life, while delivering trenchant critiques of white settler abuses; yet he advocated for religious conformity more than for indigenous survivance.¹ Thus, to better contextualize Apess’ life and works, we need to critically and carefully consider nineteenth-century modes of identity formation, national affiliation, cultural performance, and racial tropes, including those articulated by Apess himself.

A working draft of this article was first presented at a symposium—“On Our Own Grounds: The Legacy of William Apess, a Pequot”—organized by Lisa Brooks and hosted at Amherst College, on December 6, 2012. I am especially indebted to Barry O’Connell, Lisa Brooks, and Drew Lopenzina for encouraging this research.

1. The term *survivance*, coined by the Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor, conveys both physical survival and cultural and political persistence of indigenous peoples: “Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion . . . the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction.” See Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1.

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If writers are shaped as much by circumstance—the places, families, and times they are born into—as by personal experience, then some of the most intriguing writers are those who meld, or transcend, these influences. William Apess² (1798–1839), a Pequot Indian³ who published five books between 1829 and 1836, is widely regarded as just such a writer. He overcame many hardships—escaping an impoverished and abused youth and navigating a world of temptation, racism, and injustice—to become a highly visible and eloquent orator and preacher. Modern scholars have largely accepted Apess’s performative role as a “poor Indian,” assuming that his opportunities were inescapably limited by his Indian-ness. Yet the same evidence reveals experiences that are far more nuanced than they first appear. Drawing from family roots that entangled “Indian” (Native American), “black” (African American), and “white” (Anglo-American or Scots-Irish) hybridity, he constructed a romanticized (and colonized) version of indigeneity—playing Indian, so to speak—to appeal to white audiences. Over time, Apess became a masterful cultural performer, effectively scripting his origins and marketing his identity in public and in print to achieve considerable visibility and status. His public persona was selected from a complex repertoire of real and fictive cultural kin that did not necessarily reflect his lived realities. Onstage and in print, he was an iconic Indian; culturally, he was often detached from indigenous lifeways and traditions and drawn to the trappings of whiteness. Thus, to contextualize Apess’s life and works, we need to critically and carefully consider nineteenth-century modes of identity formation, national affiliation, cultural performance, and racial tropes, including those articulated by Apess himself.

2. The spelling of his name varies in printed texts. His name was spelled Apes in four of the five works he published between 1829 and 1836; in the last, published in 1836, the second *s* was added to his name. Following Barry O’Connell’s lead, I am using Apess in my text to reflect what appears to have been his personal preference. His descendants have variously used Apes, Epps, and Apess. See William Apess, *On Our Own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, a Pequot*, ed. Barry O’Connell (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), xiv.

3. *Pequot*, in Apess’s case, specifically refers to the historical and contemporary Mashantucket Pequots of present-day southern Connecticut. During the early nineteenth century, the term *Indian* was commonly used as a generic signifier for indigenous Native Americans. Unless the text indicates otherwise, no pejorative is intended by the use of an admittedly somewhat antiquated term. Throughout this essay I will also use the terms *Native* and *indigenous* interchangeably to refer broadly to Native American peoples in the United States and First Nations peoples in Canada.

In many ways, William Apess was a man full of contradictions. He identified as Pequot, but he admitted that, as a child, he had been so disconnected from Native culture that he envisioned all Indians as terrifying savages. When abused by his Pequot kin, he found shelter in the homes of his white neighbors. When indentured, he longed to be free; when free, he longed to return to the homes of his masters. His youthful “wanderings” were not accidental, but deliberate, as he ran away from some opportunities and toward others. Although racially marked as a person of color, he reports having had little difficulty finding paying work, quickly picking up the necessary skills to do farming, coopering, shoemaking, hunting, maple sugaring, and so on.⁴ As an adult, he enjoyed situational privileges as a male, a Christian, a popular orator, and an author with access to a printing press. Despite his Indian-ness (or, more likely, because of it), he achieved measurable success.

Although he was a powerful voice for indigenous sovereignty, his dreams were always entangled with white values. He sought to incorporate Indians into a race-blind Methodist Christian identity, perhaps thinking that white social networks were more nurturing and sustainable than Native American (read: nonwhite and non-Christian) networks damaged by colonization. He demanded that Indians be granted American citizenship, the same as whites, during an era when Native nations most wanted to govern themselves.⁵ At key moments of transition, he would, often literally, run away to seek the company of his mixed-race father. If writers are shaped by the places they call home, I would suggest that William Apess’s emotional touchstone was situated not in Connecticut, but in the hardscrabble landscape of Colrain, Massachusetts, where he was born.

A LOOKING GLASS ON COLRAIN

In the opening pages of the 1829 edition of his autobiography, *A Son of the Forest*, William Apess describes his father’s relocation from Connecticut to Massachusetts: “He then removed to the back settlements, directing his course to the west and afterwards to the north-east, and pitched his tent in

4. See the many examples of itinerant work found in William Apes, *A Son of the Forest: The Experience of William Apes, a Native of the Forest, Comprising a Notice of the Pequod Tribe of Indians* (New York: By the author, 1829).

5. Jean O’Brien suggests that Apess’s ideas about citizenship should be read not just as subsuming Indians into American citizenry, but as expressions of an incipient theory of dual citizenship that would permit indigenous political sovereignty to coexist with American citizenship. See Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 186.

the woods of a town called Colereign, near the Connecticut river, in the state of Massachusetts, where he continued for some time.”⁶ This statement seems straightforward, but the directions are odd. To reach Colrain from Colchester, one would start by heading overland twenty-five miles northwest to reach the Connecticut River; the next stage would head due north about seventy miles, by boat or on well-worn cart roads beside the river. At Deerfield or Greenfield, one would turn westward again, following the present-day Mohican-Mohawk trail about ten miles to reach Colrain. At no stage would this journey turn to the “north-east.” A leisurely trip on foot could easily be completed within a few weeks, traveling an average of ten miles per day, allowing for some of the hilly terrain. If Apess’s recollection is correct, he may be describing a different journey. In the version of his autobiography that appeared in *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequod Tribe*, Apess says that his parents behaved like other Indians: “My parents were of the same disposition of the Indians, that is, to wander to and fro. And, although my father was partly white, yet he had so much of the native blood that he fashioned after them in traveling from river to river, and from mountain to mountain, and plain to plain, on their journey.”⁷ Perhaps the family was following a traveling subsistence life, as many other Native people did, tracking wild game, trading, and doing itinerant labor in rural towns, in addition to making and peddling baskets.⁸ If so, they probably crossed paths with other Native people living in and around the hills and forests of Vermont, New Hampshire, upstate New York, and the Berkshire Mountains.⁹

Another likely possibility is that his parents left Pequot land to head west, following dozens of Christianized Mohegan, Pequot, Montauk, and

6. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 8. Since quotations are drawn from two different editions of *A Son of the Forest*, parenthetical dates are included to distinguish between the two.

7. William Apess, *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequod Tribe; or, An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man*, in Apess, *On Our Own Ground*, 120.

8. See, for example, Donna Baron, J. Edward Hood, and Holly V. Izard, “They Were Here All Along: The Native American Presence in Lower-Central New England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53 (July 1996): 561–86. Also see O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*.

9. For a discussion of these regional Native lifeways and networks, see Russell G. Handsman and Trudie Lamb Richmond, “Confronting Colonialism: The Mahican and Schaghticoke Peoples and Us,” in Peter R. Schmidt and Thomas C. Patterson, eds., *Making Alternative Histories: The Practice of Archaeology and History in Non-Western Settings* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1995), 87–117.

Narragansett people who left around 1785 to relocate to the Brotherton Indian settlement in Oneida, New York.¹⁰ Ironically, as Drew Lopenzina has observed, some of these Christian Indians were lured westward by the promise of the 1785 Land Ordinance, following the lead of surveyors who carved out new settlements in Haudenosaunee and Mohican territories, including designating townships for the “sole use of the Christian Indians.”¹¹ Their trek westward constituted the “unusual event of a group of Native Americans ordering their own westward migration at the dawn of both rampant American expansionism and Indian removal.”¹² Perhaps, somewhere along the way, Apess’s parents heard of a better option. So, rather than turn back toward Connecticut, they then could have charted a course to the northeast, over the Berkshire Mountains, navigating their way overland to Colrain.

To understand Colrain’s tangled history, we should look back a few generations earlier, when this hilly landscape was occupied by Mohican and Sokoki Abenaki Indian peoples. The terrain was rough, rugged, and rocky, at elevations between 1,100 and 1,400 feet on the eastern edge of the Berkshire Hills, above two fast-moving waterways, branches of the North River that flowed into the Deerfield River. There was good hunting and good fishing, and the small lakes, beaver meadows, and marshes attracted waterfowl. The thick forests were full of hardwoods and evergreens, food and medicinal plants. Residence became more difficult, however, after colonial settler populations arrived. The area was also familiar to Native people from southern New England, since some of them found refuge there in the aftermath of King Philip’s War in the late 1600s.¹³

The first white settler colonials to arrive were two brothers, Andrew and

10. These Christianized Mohegan, Pequot, Wampanoag, Montauk, Nipmuc, and Narragansett families, led by the Mohegan preachers Samson Occum and Joseph Johnson, were granted a tract of land in Oneida Indian territory to resettle. See Laura J. Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren: The Writings of Joseph Johnson, 1751–1776* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

11. Drew Lopenzina, “‘The Whole Wilderness Shall Blossom as the Rose’: Samson Occum, Joseph Johnson, and the Question of Native Settlement on Cooper’s Frontier,” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (December 2006): 1123. For the survey, see C. Albert White, *A History of the Rectangular Survey System* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1983), 3.

12. Lopenzina, “‘The Whole Wilderness,’” 1140.

13. Lisa T. Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 26.

John Smith, who left Deerfield and arrived on horseback, “with their axes in their saddlebags,” around 1732.¹⁴ They were driven off by Abenaki, Mohican, and Mohawk people who, having formed new multiracial alliances among themselves, were then actively policing the northern and western Massachusetts frontier.¹⁵ In 1735 selectmen from the Town of Boston announced a claim to the territory, designating three plots six miles square as Boston Townships no. 1 (Charlemont), no. 2 (Colrain), and no. 3 (Pittsfield or Housatonuck). The plan was to settle sixty families on each plot; each family was expected to construct a dwelling sized “eighteen feet square,” and to claim, at minimum, fifty acres. Houses for settled ministers, meetinghouses, and schools were to be built as well.¹⁶

In that same year, Massachusetts Governor Jonathan Belcher agreed to a meeting with a coalition of Mohawk, Abenaki, and Mohican delegates who wished to “renew their friendship with us.” More than 140 Native delegates (Kahnawake Mohawk, Hudson River Mohican, Saint Francis Abenaki, Housatonic Mohican, and Schaghticoke Indians) gathered for a week of meetings in Deerfield.¹⁷ At this time, “Schaghticoke” did not point to the tribal nation in Connecticut, but to the refugee village near Albany, set aside by the State of New York for Native refugees from King Philip’s War.¹⁸ The attendees negotiated promises to end conflict, assign a new English missionary to the Mohicans at Stockbridge, and guarantee regular trade through the new truck house at Fort Dummer (now Brattleboro, Vermont). In addition, a group of Native families made arrangements to transact deeds for lands along the Deerfield and Northfield rivers in the present-day towns of Ashfield, Buckland, Colrain, Florida, Hawley, Heath, Monroe, Rowe,

14. Charles McClellan, *The Early Settlers of Colrain, Mass.; or, Some Account of the Early Settlement of “Boston township no. 2, alias Codrain”* (Greenfield, Mass.: W. S. Carson, 1885), 7.

15. Brooks, *The Common Pot*, 27.

16. McClellan, *The Early Settlers of Colrain, Mass.*, 9–10.

17. See John Wainwright, *At a Conference Held at Deerfield in the County of Hampshire* (Boston, 1735), microfilm manuscript 3916 in the collections of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass. Also see George Sheldon, ed., *The Conference at Deerfield, Mass., August 27–31, 1735, between Gov. Belcher and Several Tribes of Western Indians* (Boston: Press of David Clapp & Son, 1906). Sheldon misidentifies the participants by mistaking Moheegs (Mohicans) for Mohawks.

18. Colin G. Calloway, *The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600–1800: War, Migration, and the Survival of an Indian People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 83.

and Savoy. The first deed, for “a Tract of Land Descended to us from our Grandmother Ohweemin,” was signed by Mauhammetpeet and Megunnisqua, who identified themselves as “Indian Women of the Scauhtecook [Schaghticoke] Tribe.”¹⁹ A supplementary document noted, “We Do further Declare to our Certain Knowledge that no Indian or Indians of what Name or Nation Soever has any just right Challenge or Interest to or in the above-said Tract of Land.”²⁰ Similar deeds were transacted for land in southern Vermont and southern New Hampshire.²¹ As Lisa Brooks has astutely observed, these deeds did not necessarily signal a decision to abandon the circumscribed territory. Instead, Native signatories believed that they were negotiating shared land use, “granting settlers the right to occupy land in common, or to settle a town,” within the bounds of existing tribal homelands. As a result, “they often resettled or resold land occupied and then abandoned by colonials.”²²

Those white colonial settlers had other ideas. The Smith brothers returned in 1736, in company with a small colony of Scots-Irish Presbyterians, emigrants from County Ulster, Ireland, including families by the name of McKown, McClellan, Morrison, Clark, Wilson, Wallace, and Stewart.²³ Members of this group, which included survivors of the Battle of Culloden and the infamous Highland clearances, were fiercely clannish and intensely religious. They had already been forced to relocate twice, having left Scotland for Ireland (where they had occupied land taken from Catholic Irish), and having then left Ireland for America (where they would occupy Native land).²⁴ In this sense, the settling of Colrain was a result of multiple other colonial “unsettlings,” including those resulting from white (English) against white (Scottish) conflicts overseas. Soon other settlers came to Boston Township no. 2, including these families: Thompson from Pelham, New Hampshire; Miller from Stowe, New Hampshire; Bell and Williams from Roxbury, Massachusetts; Miner from Stonington, Connecticut; Smith

19. John Stoddard and Captain Israel Williams signed on behalf of Massachusetts Bay. See Harry Andrew Wright, *Indian Deeds of Hamden County* (Springfield, Mass.: Harry Andrew Wright, 1905), 120–22.

20. *Ibid.*, 123.

21. *Ibid.*, 124–33.

22. Brooks, *The Common Pot*, 35–36.

23. Other Scots-Irish families included Luke, McCollister, McCrillison, McCullough, McDonald, McDonegal, McGrew, McLantham, and Workman. See Louis H. Everts, *History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1879).

24. McClellan, *The Early Settlers of Colrain*, 14–17.

from Woodstock, Connecticut; Brown from Rhode Island; and Bolton from Lancashire, England.²⁵ Upon their arrival in the new township, each family claimed a fifty-acre plot and began constructing the requisite log or plank home eighteen to twenty feet square and seven feet high. The forests provided abundant timber for building homes and mills.

Here it is important to note that, elsewhere in Puritan New England, the Irish and Scots were considered ethnic and religious minorities of a lower class than elite (English) whites.²⁶ In the uncolonized lands of northwestern Massachusetts, and in the unceded Abenaki territory in present-day Vermont and New Hampshire, they perceived opportunities to build their own settlements and practice their own religions, even if they had to displace Indians to do so. None of these settlers had participated in earlier diplomatic meetings with local Native communities, and so, rather than even attempt to negotiate coexistence, they were more than willing to be conscripted into war. Men from Colrain served in the colonial militia, some of them joining up with Robert Rogers (who himself was the son of Scots-Irish emigrants) to lead raids into Abenaki territory.²⁷ They constructed three forts (garrison houses) in Boston Township no. 2 to stand against frequent attacks by the French and their Indian (Abenaki and Mohawk) allies.²⁸ When the last of the (so-called) French and Indian Wars ended, so did the attacks, but chilling stories of warfare have been passed down to the present day.

By 1761 the town was incorporated and named Coleraine, after the homeland of those first Scots-Irish emigrants; this was later shortened to Colrain. As in the neighboring hill towns of Ashfield, Charlemont, and Shelburne, the rocky pastures were hard to farm for grain crops, but they provided perfect livestock grazing for cattle and sheep, which provided milk, meat, leather, and wool. Local farmers also kept bees for honey, apple orchards for cider, and maple groves for sugaring, as did virtually all agrarian

25. The descendants of these and others—Avery, Clark, Colson, Forsyth, Heath, Henderson, Hutchinson, and Lyman—can still be found in the hill towns today. Everts, *History of the Connecticut Valley*, 2:747.

26. Samuel Swett Green, "The Scotch-Irish in America," *American Antiquarian Society* (April 1895): 32–70.

27. McClellan, *The Early Settlers of Colrain*, 14–17. John F. Ross, *War on the Run: The Epic Story of Robert Rogers and the Conquest of America's First Frontier* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011).

28. Michael D. Coe, *The Line of Forts: Historical Archaeology on the Colonial Frontier of Massachusetts* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2006).

settlements of the time in New England.²⁹ Winters were extreme in the hill towns, but food was abundant, since local farmers did most of their large-scale butchering (sheep, pigs, cattle) and meat processing and smoking in winter. By 1770 the town had laid out three school districts, and around 1774 the first schoolhouse was constructed.³⁰ Cart roads were cleared through the forests and up into the hills, and trails and waterways offered relatively easy travel to the nearest towns. By 1790 Colrain had about one thousand acres of cleared pastureland, and the rivers provided power for a sawmill and gristmill. The town had established multiple school districts for public education, and it hosted itinerant schoolteachers who also visited the hilltop settlements. Several larger timber-framed and wood-sided homes were built to replace the early log houses; these were, on average, two stories high and four rooms square, with central stairways. Many of the original settlers were still living on their original home lots, while their children and grandchildren were situated on working farms nearby.³¹ The town was not exclusively white, nor exclusively Scots-Irish; when the Reverend Daniel McClellan, a Presbyterian minister, arrived, he brought “three colored servants,” probably the first African Americans in the town.³²

Native American people were still present in the region, but they were quite a bit more elusive in the hill town records, in large part because of the colonial settler ethos of imagining indigenous homeland as a supposed wilderness. Early historians characterized Colrain (and virtually every other remote or mountainous locale) as a “pathless forest tracked only by savages, and inhabited only by bears and wolves,” conveniently overlooking the fact that Native people had resided there for millennia.³³ Ironically, having been inspired by this trope, present-day scholars have also imagined the Apess family’s move to Colrain as a trek into a wild forest, rather than a move to a settled township. John Kucich asserts that Colrain was a “frontier landscape that bears the raw marks of stolen land,” a characterization that was true in the 1730s, but far less so in the 1790s.³⁴ Daniel Mandell pictures a

29. Everts, *History of the Connecticut Valley*, 2:738, 753, and McClellan, *The Early Settlers of Colrain, Mass.*

30. McClellan, *The Early Settlers of Colrain, Mass.*, 34.

31. Everts, *History of the Connecticut Valley*, 2:752.

32. McClellan, *The Early Settlers of Colrain, Mass.*, 39.

33. *Ibid.*, 11.

34. John J. Kucich, “Sons of the Forest: Environment and Transculturation in Jonathan Edwards, Samson Occom and William Apess,” in Robin DeRosa, ed., *Assimilation and Subversion in Earlier American Literature* (Newcastle, U.K.: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 16.

“camp on the outskirts of Colrain” as part of a mixed-race “backwoods” community.³⁵ Ron Welburn imagines Colrain as “a humble birthplace in the forest near a small village.”³⁶ Jean O’Brien states that Apess was “born into poverty,”³⁷ and Philip Gura calls it “abject poverty.”³⁸ Robert Warrior envisions Colrain as a place even farther distant, suggesting that the Apess family followed a strategy of avoidance by going “as far as possible out of the way of colonial settlement.”³⁹ Barry O’Connell, tacking closer to the truth, characterizes Colrain as a “remote small town,”⁴⁰ but even this is a misleading representation of Colrain.

At the time of Apess’s birth, on January 31, 1798, Colrain *was* part of the “back settlements,” but it was neither the backwoods nor the frontier. It was a burgeoning hill town close by the Green River and the two branches of the North River, with a population of around one thousand people living on small farms interspersed with forests and swamps spread across a plot six miles square.⁴¹ The older farms were fifty to one hundred acres in size, and about thirty-five new, smaller house lots had been mapped out on the rocky and hilly ground around Catamount Hill.⁴² Colrain was rural, but by no means remote. Nor was it small. It was close in size to the other hill towns around it, each of which was as large as, if not larger than, towns in the middle Connecticut River Valley. When President Timothy Dwight from Yale College passed through the area during his travels, he reckoned a regional population count in 1790 of 1,183 inhabitants in Shelburne (a few miles south of Colrain); 2,093 inhabitants in Conway (a few

35. Daniel Mandell, *Tribe, Race History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1770–1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 45.

36. Ron Welburn, “Son Lost in the Swamp: William Apess’s Allegory of Faith,” in Welburn, *Roanoke and Wampum: Topics in Native American Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 97.

37. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, 180.

38. Philip F. Gura, *The Life of William Apess, Pequot* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), xiv.

39. Robert Warrior, “Eulogy on William Apess,” in Warrior, *The People and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 12.

40. Barry O’Connell, introduction to Apess, *On Our Own Ground*, xxviii.

41. Everts, *History of the Connecticut Valley*, 2:746–50.

42. The name Catamount Hill derives from the population of eastern mountain lions (*Felis concolor*), also known as cougars, panthers, and catamounts, that inhabited rocky dens in the region into the 1700s. Carl G. Smith, “From Homesteads to Cellar Holes on Catamount Hill, Colrain, Massachusetts,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 96 (January 1942): 60–69.

miles to the west); and 1,498 inhabitants in Greenfield (nine miles to the east).⁴³ By 1820 the population of Colrain was 1,961, most residents being clustered around a new business hub, called “Colrain City,” which included three inns with taverns, a general store, potash works, tin shop, cooperage, wagon shop, and hat shop. Colrain was at the time the most populous town in Franklin County.⁴⁴

Scholars have assumed that the Apess family was living in a tent in mid-winter atop a mountain, but from a purely practical viewpoint, this makes little sense. To more accurately interpret the text, a knowledge of nineteenth-century colloquialisms is necessary. Apess merely says that his father “pitched his tent in the woods” of Colrain.⁴⁵ In the late 1700s, a “pitch” was defined as “a piece of ground selected by a settler or allotted to him, usu. for a house or farm.” To “make one’s pitch” and “pitch one’s tent” were very common colloquialisms, meaning “to establish one’s residence, to take up one’s abode” at a new homestead. An English traveler in New England, writing in 1809, described finding, in the newer settlements, “what the Americans call a pitch. They cut down some trees, make a log-house, sow some corn . . . and so on until they produce something in the style of a farm.”⁴⁶ On rural farms in the hill towns of New England, tents were rarely seen; family members, slaves, indentured servants, hired laborers, and, in some cases, even traveling Indians, would routinely stay, at the very least, in a barn or outbuilding.⁴⁷

It’s not clear exactly where William Apess staked his pitch, but if he arrived in the mid-1790s, as his son suggests, he might have taken up one of the new house lots available on Catamount Hill. Most of the homes there were small and square, one story, and two rooms wide, with a central chimney and attic or loft. One resident of Catamount Hill in that era,

43. Timothy Dwight, *Travels: New-England and New-York*, vol. 2 (New Haven: S. Converse, 1821). Dwight’s census also reckoned six to seven inhabitants in each home in the region.

44. *Vital Records of Colrain, Massachusetts, to the Year 1850* (Salem, Mass.: Essex Institute, 1934). John Warner Barber, *Historical Collections Relating to the History and Antiquities of Every Town in Massachusetts with Geographical Descriptions* (Worcester, Mass.: Warren Lazell, 1848).

45. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 8.

46. These definitions of *pitch* come from Mitford M. Mathews, ed., *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 2:1254.

47. For several examples of traveling Indians routinely lodging in whites’ homes and barns, see Baron et al., “They Were Here All Along.”

Ammon Davenport, recalled his family's "wood-colored" house, which stood at "the head of the old Beaver Meadow": "this house never enjoyed the luxury of a coat of paint from first to last. . . . Our family lived in this one story, wood colored house, having only two rooms on the ground floor, with a large chimney in the middle between the two rooms some eight feet square at the base, with a large brick oven on one side."⁴⁸ Davenport's house was often drafty, and it was not always weatherproof; when lying in the loft, he "could see daylight in many places between the shingles, and on waking many a cold morning in winter would find a snow drift two or three inches on my bed."⁴⁹ Small houses like these were the norm for roughly one-third of New England's inhabitants, in large part because they were inexpensive and relatively quick to build, given sufficient local timber and neighbors to help. In central Massachusetts, most folks aspired to build a "middling sized home," measuring roughly seven hundred to nine hundred square feet and containing eight to fifteen windows. As Jack Larkin explains, such a home "exemplified not prosperity but a 'competence,' enough property to have a sense of independence and respectability." A more modest "small house," two rooms wide and one story high, would cost less than \$150 and measure about six hundred square feet; Larkin says that these homes were typically occupied by "economically struggling and marginal families, which are usually missing from conventional pictures."⁵⁰ In Colrain and in the hill towns, however, most of the houses were small.

Catamount Hill would have been attractive to the Apess family for multiple reasons. Land was cheap and timber was abundant. Although the population was mostly white, there were other people of color, although their names and stories are not well recorded. They included: Susan Freeman, who came to Colrain as a slave and later relocated to Springfield as a free woman; Peter Green Sr., a Revolutionary War veteran, and his wife, Violette; and Peter Green Jr., a blacksmith in Colrain who was identified in the census as "mulatto."⁵¹ One home lot on Catamount Hill was occupied by a family apparently identified as "Savage," but "All traces of the family are

48. Ammon Davenport, "Some Reminiscences of a Barefoot Boy," in *A Sketch of Life on the Mountain* (Colrain, Mass.: Town of Colrain, 1900), 87, 89. Thanks to Drew Lopenzina for sharing this reference.

49. *Ibid.*, 87.

50. Jack Larkin, "Big House, Middling House, Small House," *Old Sturbridge Village*, March 2004, http://resources.osv.org/explore_learn/document_viewer.php?Action=View&DocID=2126.

51. "Colrain's Black American History Explored in Talk," *Greenfield (Mass.) Recorder*, December 10, 2015.

lost and nothing is left to mark the site.” It is unclear, from this single reference, whether “Savage” was an English surname or an ethnic identifier.⁵²

Catamount Hill was especially attractive to Methodists, since a reformed sect gathered there regularly for religious services, meeting in homes, groves, fields, and caves. There were also visiting itinerant schoolteachers who regularly “boarded around, going from house to house, the time of their stay varying according to the number of pupils in the family.”⁵³ In Colrain, families made most of their own clothes, doing “all the carding, spinning, dyeing, and weaving,” but every fall, “A shoemaker was also hired, who came to the house with his lasts, bench and kit, and took the measures of the feet, and shod up the family for the winter’s campaign.”⁵⁴ Here is where the Apess family surfaces in the town’s records: William Apess’s father was a shoemaker.⁵⁵ If we keep this occupation in mind, the Apess family can be seen not as marginal, but as important contributors to the functioning of a community where the vast majority of travel was via “shank’s mare”—that is, on foot.⁵⁶

Apess’s father—also named William Apes (with one *s*)—moved back and forth between Colrain and Colchester frequently, keeping homes and finding work in at least these two distinct locales. Although a great deal of land in New England had been cleared for farming and grazing, there were still resource-rich forests and swamps where Native people could hunt and harvest wild game, medicinal plants, firewood, and so on. Across New England, Native people regularly harvested ash trees for basket making and peddled baskets and brooms door-to-door.⁵⁷ In some locales, they found work as itinerant laborers, farmworkers, and household servants. In Ledyard, Connecticut, the Reverend John Avery recalled that Pequot Indians

52. “In the neighborhood of the Randall lot was what was known as the Savage place”; Smith, “From Homesteads to Cellar Holes,” 69. Since no reference has yet been found to the English family name of Savage in other histories of Colrain, it’s unclear whether this is a surname or a racial designation.

53. Davenport, “Some Reminiscences of a Barefoot Boy,” 89.

54. *Ibid.*, 88.

55. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 90.

56. Also “shin-stage,” “a journey on foot, no stage-coach: non-aristocratic colloquialism”: mid-C. 18–mid-19”; Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1050.

57. See, for example, Nan Wolverton, “A Precarious Living: Basket Making and Related Crafts among New England Indians,” in Colin G. Calloway and Neal Salisbury, eds., *Reinterpreting New England Indians and the Colonial Experience* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2003), 341–68.

readily found work as “good farm hands”; they were “excellent help when employed to work for others,” and Native women “were more or less frequently employed by families in the neighborhood.”⁵⁸

Although Native families found multiple ways to sustain themselves, nineteenth-century town historians tended to conceptualize them all as struggling remnants, isolated individuals eking out a living by peddling their wares and their labor on the edges of white society.⁵⁹ In nearby Northfield, Massachusetts, for example, during the mid-1800s, Josiah Temple recalled that “Single families camped through the season—perhaps for a series of years—in some secluded spot; and straggling parties were wandering round during the warm weather. The men were sometimes hired by the farmers to assist them in certain kinds of labor. The squaws were skilled in making light baskets and peeled brooms, which they peddled by sale or barter.”⁶⁰ Some traveling Indians were actually described as well-to-do. One such group probably passed through Colrain, following the Deerfield River, on their way to Deerfield in 1837. A description of their visit, which received notice in the *Greenfield Gazette and Mercury*, reads in part: “They appear to be comfortably well off for Indians, having several horses and wagons, and a goodly supply of blankets and buffalo robes. They are of the St. Francis [Abenaki] tribe, in Canada. . . . They are very hospitably treated by the Deerfield people. We understand they will return to their homes, from which they have been absent nearly a year, by the way of Albany.”⁶¹ This particular group, although described as having come from Canada, included direct descendants of the signatories of those 1735 deeds.⁶² Whether seen

58. John Avery, *History of the Town of Ledyard, 1650–1900* (Norwich, Conn.: Noyes and Davis, 1901), 257–60.

59. See, for example, Wolverton, “A Precarious Living”; Baron et al., “They Were Here All Along”; and O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*.

60. Josiah H. Temple and George Sheldon, *History of the Town of Northfield, Massachusetts* (Albany: Joel Munsell, 1875), 57.

61. *Greenfield (Mass.) Gazette and Mercury*, August 15, 1837. For a discussion of the identities of these Native people and their relations to Deerfield, see Margaret Bruchac, “Abenaki Connections to 1704: The Sadoques Family and Deerfield, 2004,” in Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney, eds., *Captive Histories: English, French, and Native Narratives of the 1704 Deerfield Raid* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 262–78.

62. For a fuller discussion of Native persistence in the Connecticut River Valley in the aftermath of the 1735 Belcher Conference, see Brooks, *The Common Pot*. Also see Margaret M. Bruchac, “Revisiting Pocumtuck History in Deerfield: George Sheldon’s Vanishing Indian Act,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 39, no. 1/2 (June 2011): 30–77.

as impoverished or prosperous, Native families in the region maintained intertribal and intercultural trails and kin networks by traveling in ways that were poorly understood by much of the surrounding white society.

A POOR INDIAN

In the opening pages of the 1829 edition of *A Son of the Forest*, Apess rather ambiguously identifies his paternal grandfather only as a “white man,” of no specified place of origin, who married a “native of the soil, or in other words a red woman,” who was “attached to the royal family: she was fair and beautiful.”⁶³ He does not mention their names or where they lived, but he says that he heard the family oral tradition directly: “How nearly she was connected with the king I cannot tell; but without doubt some degree of affinity subsisted between them. I have frequently heard my grandmother talk about it, and nearly as I can tell, she was his grand or great-grand daughter.”⁶⁴ In the second edition of the autobiography, published in 1831, Apess was still vague about his grandfather’s origins, but he identified his grandmother more confidently as “a female attached to the royal family of Philip, king of the Pequod tribe of Indians.”⁶⁵ Although he appears to have conflated the Pequot War of 1637 with King Philip’s War of 1675–76,⁶⁶ it is also possible that the grandmother was both Wampanoag *and* Pequot in ancestry.

Apess’s grandfather was very likely a soldier in Connecticut, serving in one of the regiments mustered in Stonington or Groton. The grandfather and father may thus have already been familiar with Colrain. During the French and Indian War, Connecticut regiments routinely crossed western Massachusetts on their way to upstate New York to fight against the French with their Abenaki and Mohawk allies. Between 1755 and 1757, Mohegan and Pequot men serving in Colonel Phineas Lyman’s regiment (out of Stonington and Groton) were sent to Fort Edward to assist General Sir William Johnson at the Battle of Lake George and the attack on the French outpost at Fort St. Frederic (Crown Point). In the 1750s William Apes and Samuel Apes (his brother?) appear on the muster and payroll lists for

63. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 8. This is an interesting choice of words, since *fair*, in a nineteenth-century context, explicitly referred to lighter skin.

64. *Ibid.*

65. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1831) in *On Our Own Ground*, 3.

66. These grandparents were probably born sometime between 1730 and 1750, a deduction that is based on my interpretation of the evidence provided in Apess’s texts.

Lyman's regiment, alongside other Mohegan and Pequot soldiers.⁶⁷ Two decades later, in 1776, during the American Revolution, the name William Apes is recorded as a soldier in Selden's regiment; he is then listed as a resident of Groton in 1785 and as a resident of Stonington before 1791.⁶⁸ This evidence suggests two generations of William Apes in military service: a grandfather who served in the French and Indian Wars, and a father who served in the Revolution. The extant muster rolls do not specify racial identity.

Apess tells us that his father "joined the Pequod tribe . . . and married a female of the tribe, in whose veins a single drop of the white man's blood never flowed."⁶⁹ The family identified henceforth as Pequot, following indigenous logics that enabled the selective incorporation of "outsiders" as a means to forge and maintain extended kinship networks. Exogamous marriage practices were both traditional and strategic; they reflected the scarcity of local marriage partners and the realities of traveling long distances to seek work and resources.⁷⁰ In New England, mixed marriages among Native people were increasingly common.⁷¹ Reckonings of Native ancestry and identity may appear to have been biologically (and genealogically) imprecise, only because these were socially negotiated identities that depended on cohabitation and kinship as much as (if not more than) blood or external appearance.

Most scholars have identified Apess's mother as Candace Apes, married to William Apes, born around 1777 and variously identified in records as Negro (African American), Pequot, and white. Candace is recorded as having been owned by a Captain Joseph Taylor of Colchester, Connecticut,

67. Connecticut Historical Society, *Rolls of Connecticut Men in the French and Indian War, 1755–1762*, 2 vols. (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1903–1905), 1:108; 2:73, 191, 221, 307. Also see Barbara W. Brown and James M. Rose, *Black Roots in Southeastern Connecticut, 1650–1900* (New London, Conn.: New London Historical Society, 1980), 9–11.

68. Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775–1783 (National Archives microfilm publication M246, 138 rolls); War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Record Group 93; National Archives, Washington, D.C. Also see O'Connell, introduction to Apess, *On Our Own Ground*, xxviii18.

69. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 4.

70. Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 3.

71. Daniel R. Mandell, "Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity: Indian-Black Inter-marriage in Southern New England, 1760–1880," *Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 466–501.

and having been freed in 1805 at age twenty-eight.⁷² This woman appears to have been continuously enslaved until William was seven years of age, which raises questions. Was she hiding in Colrain, having escaped from Connecticut? If so, why did she return? Was she actually Apess's mother? My interpretation of the evidence agrees with Nancy Shoemaker's assessment that Candace was *not* Apess's mother, but was, in fact, his father's second partner or wife.⁷³ The local historian John Avery may have been discussing Apes when he wrote, "One man, who was about half Indian and half white, had at one time a white woman (for, I believe, he was never married), after that a full-blooded squaw, and finally, a full-blooded negress."⁷⁴ Confusing as these arrangements may be, they reflect the flexible partnerings that Native people in New England often made, or were forced to make, to cope with challenges—warfare, indenture, slavery, displacement—that drove families apart in ways that were difficult for later historians to understand or track.⁷⁵

William Apess's account suggests that his biological mother lived with his father in Colrain and bore children there (including William and several others), but that she separated from his father after they returned to Connecticut. Apess describes his mother as "full-blooded Pequot," but, given his report that she was a descendant of King Philip, she might have been Wampanoag. She might have been a refugee from King Philip's War living in the hills. She might have had family elsewhere who needed her. All that we can confirm, at this distance, is that she was socially and personally identified as Indian, and that the family's life together in Colrain (and, for a time, in Colchester) was one of "comparative comfort." The first few years of Apess's life were not as desperate as scholars have assumed. Things

72. Barry O'Connell speculates that perhaps William Apes was working in the same household as Candace, but there is no clear evidence documenting how they met; O'Connor, introduction to Apess, *On Our Own Ground*, xxviii18.

73. Nancy Shoemaker, *Native American Whalemen and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 146.

74. Avery, *History of the Town of Ledyard*, 257. Shoemaker suggests that if this was Apes, then Avery confused the sequence of partners. The 1820 Colrain census is not necessarily helpful, in that the entire family is identified as white.

75. O'Connell, for example, expresses puzzlement about William Apes Sr.'s marriages, assuming that there was only one wife and that the couple "reconciled and separated a number of times"; see O'Connell, introduction to Apess, *On Our Own Ground*, xxix. Many similarly confusing case histories of multiple marriages and shifting relationships are noted in Mandell, "Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity."

changed, however, much for the worse, when his father and mother “quarreled” and parted when he was about three years of age. As a result, he says, “I saw my mother’s face no more for twenty years.”⁷⁶ Perhaps they quarreled when Candace Apes entered the picture?

At this juncture, when he was about three, Apess and his two brothers and two sisters were sent to live with his maternal grandparents in Colchester. It is assumed that these were the parents of his biological mother, but he introduces some doubt by saying that he lived with “my grandfather and his companion,” suggesting a woman who may not have been a blood relative. Here is where his childhood horrors began. When these elders indulged in excessive drinking, the children were targeted for special abuse. On one occasion, in the midst of a hard rainstorm, the children were locked in a cellar, where, “when we complained of cold and hunger, she unfeelingly bid us dance and thereby warm ourselves—but we had no food of any kind; and one of my sisters almost died of hunger.” The most severe abuse occurred when the older woman turned on four-year-old Apess and began to beat him with a club, leaving him “bruised and mangled.” An uncle who lived with the family saved the boy, even though his grandfather took up a firebrand to prevent the intervention.⁷⁷ In looking back, Apess attributed this savage treatment not to those who inflicted it but to white people who “introduced spirituous liquors” that encouraged Native people to drink to excess, and who stole the Native lands they depended on for survival.⁷⁸

Yet it was white people who saved him when a neighboring family petitioned the town selectmen in Colchester for relief. William became a “town charge” in the care of the Furmans, a family that had often brought food to the starving children. At that stage in his life, young Apess discovered that he was safer living among white strangers than he was living with his own Indian kin. He described them as kindly Baptists, noting that they had cared for him during the entire year it took for him to recover from his grandmother’s beating. When he had recovered, it was agreed that he should be bound out as an indentured servant until the age of twenty-one. He recalled that the Furmans had showed him “the utmost kindness,” and since there was affection on both sides, it was decided that he would stay until he reached legal age: “They had become very fond of me, and as I could not be satisfied to leave them as I loved them with the strength of filial love. . . . According to the spirit of the indentures, if I mistake not, I

76. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 8.

77. *Ibid.*, 9–12.

78. Apess, *Experiences of Five Christian Indians*, 121.

was to have so much instruction as to be able to read and write, and at the expiration of the term of my apprenticeship they were to furnish me with two suits of clothes. . . . when I had reached my sixth year, they sent me to school—this they continued to do for six successive winters, in which time I learned to read and write, so that I might be understood.”⁷⁹ In later life Apess would claim to be relatively uneducated, but those six winters of schooling made him well-read and well-spoken, more so than many of his white and Native contemporaries. For this skill, he noted, “I desire to be truly thankful to God for I cannot make you sensible of the amount of benefit I have received from it.”⁸⁰ The Furmans also introduced William to the teachings of the Bible, took him to church services, and trained him in proper deportment.

It was while living with the Furmans, only after leaving his birth family, that William became cognizant of the fact that he was an “Indian.” This was a term he had despised hearing, considering it “disgraceful to be called an Indian . . . and I have often been led to inquire where the whites received this word, which they so often threw as an opprobrious epithet at the sons of the forest.”⁸¹ He had heard terrifying tales of hostile Indians, perhaps from inherited memories of colonial wars: “It may be proper for me here to remark that the great fear I entertained of my [Indian] brethren was occasioned by the many stories I had heard of their cruelty toward the whites—how they were in the habit of killing and scalping men, women, and children. But the whites did not tell me that they were in a great majority of instances the aggressors.”⁸² These fears were so ingrained that “a mere threat of being sent away among the Indians into the dreary woods had a much better effect in making me obedient to the commands of my superiors than any corporal punishment that was ever inflicted.” Once, when he encountered some slightly dark-skinned white women while out berry picking, he mistook them for Indians, and after his “imagination had pictured out a tale of blood,” he fled to the Furmans for safety.⁸³

Over time, William fell into some bad habits, including petty thievery and lying, but Mrs. Furman consistently tutored him with kindness. He lost favor with the Furmans only after a servant girl falsely accused him of threatening her with a knife. Was she jealous, perhaps, of the Indian boy

79. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 15.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., 10.

82. Apess, *A Son of the Forest* (1831) in *On Our Own Ground*, 11.

83. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 10.

who had received such special treatment? Mr. Furman beat him, calling him an “Indian dog,” but William blamed himself for having lied in the past and planted the seeds of suspicion. He found religious inspiration while attending meetings of a group of dissenting Methodists, but after being forbidden to continue, he fell into a state of “continual ferment.” When Mr. Furman’s mother passed away, William thought of running away. After a permitted fortnight at the home of Judge William Hillhouse, he discovered to his dismay that he had been sold to Hillhouse. This situation proved untenable, not least because Hillhouse forbade the boy to attend prayer meetings. As he so often did at times of crisis, William ran away to visit his father, who was then living about twenty miles north of Waterford; after staying a week, he was persuaded by his father to return to Hillhouse.⁸⁴ At no point does William suggest that his father intended him to be, in effect, enslaved; to the contrary, indentured servitude (only if under a kind master) could provide a youth with a guarantee of home, food, and education. During this era, many young men learned a trade by living under an indenture to a blacksmith, cooper, or other artisan. As it turned out, William’s next indenture would be instructional in another sense.

About six months later, in 1809, Hillhouse sold Apess’s indenture contract to William Williams, a wealthy judge in New London. Later that same year, the judge was appointed by the state as an overseer to the Mashantucket Pequot community.⁸⁵ Apess was excited to live with the judge, and he especially appreciated the “finery and show” of living in a wealthy household, with “good new clothes . . . enough to eat, both as it respects quality and quantity, and my work was light.”⁸⁶ He stayed with the family for about four years, gaining further education and absorbing some of the precepts of legal argumentation from his association with the judge. Yet he also gained critical consciousness and became increasingly troubled by the fact that these people were not his family, but his masters. He continued attending evangelical Methodist meetings, but he was warned that Methodism was considered a dangerous form of religious fanaticism. He became particularly attracted to the Methodists’ oratorical style, noting, “Their language was not fashioned after the wisdom of men,” but was infused with the “power of God.”⁸⁷ The emotional effect of his religious awakening struck him with unexpected force; he felt himself to be inherently sinful, doomed, and

84. Ibid., 12–13.

85. Apess, *On Our Own Ground*, 16n9.

86. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 35.

87. Ibid., 38.

friendless, and “at times I wished to become a dweller in the wilderness.”⁸⁸ The more Judge Williams tried to dissuade Apess from praying with the Methodists, the more determined he became, even borrowing his master’s horse to get to a meeting. Eventually, he ran away, in company with John, another indentured servant. After purchasing a bottle of rum and a new pair of shoes (on the judge’s account), he made his way to his father’s house. Once again, his father tried to persuade him to return to serve out the term of his indenture. Instead, the two young men ran away to New York.⁸⁹

LOST AND FOUND IN THE FOREST

In 1813, at age fifteen, while wandering around New York City, William Apess, “fell in with a sergeant and a file of men who were enlisting soldiers” for the 1814 invasion of Canada.⁹⁰ Despite his desire to live an honest, sober, religious life, the lure of military adventure (he was perhaps hoping to emulate the experiences of his father and grandfather) inspired him to falsify his age as seventeen and join a New York militia unit.⁹¹ By his own admission, he soon became “as bad as any of them; could drink rum, play cards, and act as wickedly.”⁹² Within a few months, he grew restless and was struck by a desire to return to his father’s place, and he nearly deserted. He must have expressed his long-held fears of meeting with “savages” to his compatriots during the march to Canada, since the officers taunted him, saying they would “make a fire in the woods, stick my skin full of pine-splinters,” have “an Indian pow-wow over me,” and burn him at the stake if he tried to desert again.⁹³ One wonders if other memories of Indian warfare experienced by his father and grandfather, gleaned from stories heard in childhood, entered his dreams. In his account of the Battle of Plattsburgh, the tone of his text suggests that he identified as white more than Indian, seeing the enemy of “Canadians and Indians” only as anonymous hostiles, growing apprehensive as “the woods fairly resounded with their yells.”⁹⁴

After mustering out in 1815, he never received either the “forty dollars bounty money,” or the “one hundred and sixty acres of land” he had been

88. *Ibid.*, 44.

89. *Ibid.*, 50.

90. *Ibid.*, 55.

91. Private William Apes, no. 2030, “Records of men enlisted in the U.S. Army prior to the Peace Establishment, May 17, 1815,” in *U.S. Army, Register of Enlistments, 1798–1914* (National Archives microfilm publication M233), 207–8.

92. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 55.

93. *Ibid.*, 58.

94. *Ibid.*, 60.

promised upon enlistment.⁹⁵ He complained of being deprived of both American citizenship and land, but he probably did not realize that the property allotted to military veterans of the War of 1812 consisted of parcels of land confiscated from Native nations in the Midwest.⁹⁶ Perhaps Apess had gained some new insight into the grievances that had inspired his Native opponents when he wrote that whites were “ready at all times to speculate on the indians and cheat them out of their rightful possessions. Let the poor indian attempt to resist the encroachments of his white neighbours, what a hue and cry is instantly raised against the poor and unoffending natives.” He began to recognize that this war, like so many others, was an act of colonial conquest conducted “on the indians for the purpose of driving them from their country, and taking possession thereof.”⁹⁷

Apess then spent about two years wandering across eastern Canada and upstate New York, working odd jobs as a farm laborer, a galley cook on a Great Lakes boat, and a baker in Montreal. In the Adirondack Mountains he was hired to assist four sport hunters on a monthlong hunting and fishing excursion.⁹⁸ The only Native people he encountered (or chose to report on) during this time were a group of Christian Indians (probably Mohawks and Ojibways) gathering at Tyendinega on the Bay of Quinte. This was an era of significant indigenous revitalization, when the teachings of the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake were spreading rapidly among the Haudenosaunee. Handsome Lake’s *Gaiwiio*, the “Good Word,” contained elements of Christian belief, but it also called for the restoration of ancient traditions to recover from damages caused by colonization.⁹⁹ Apess made no mention of any specific religious practices he witnessed at Tyendinega, but he did record a romantic view of a landscape that may have resembled the rocky streams of Colrain: “There was also in the neighbourhood a rock, that had the appearance of being hollowed out by the hand of a skilful artificer; I could not but admire the wisdom of God in the order, regularity and beauty of creation; I then turned my eyes to the forest and it appeared alive with its sons and daughters. There appeared to be the utmost order and regularity

95. Ibid., 65.

96. Robert Mayo, *Army and Navy Pension Laws, and Bounty Land Laws of the United States, Including Sundry Resolutions of Congress from 1776–1852* (Washington, D.C.: J. T. Towers, 1852).

97. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 66–67.

98. Ibid., 75.

99. Laurence M. Hauptman, *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership: The Six Nations since 1800* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 6–7.

in their encampment and they held all things in common.”¹⁰⁰ Interestingly, in his revised edition of *A Son of the Forest*, he deleted the phrase “and they held all things in common.” This is a curious omission of a precept that was central to the ethos of the *Gaiwiio*. Did he feel that common property was a pagan concept? Apess reverted to a classic trope, depicting these Native people as players in a romantic idyll, while expressing his hope that “pious missionaries” would visit these people, as a means to ensure that the “forests of Canada and the west are vocal with the praises of God, as they ascend from the happy wigwams of the natives.”¹⁰¹

During his journey back to Connecticut, Apess took work where he could find it, but at several stages he resorted to the “accursed liquor again,” and he also visited a brothel (identified at the time as a “dance house”); this fact was omitted from the revised autobiography.¹⁰² In 1817, at age nineteen, he finally returned to Pequot territory in Groton to reunite with his aunt Sally George, a central figure in a regional religious awakening. George could not read, but she could eloquently cite scripture and convey “the graciously reviving promises” of the faith. She visited the sick, supported the poor, and hosted regular meetings, lasting three days at a time, attended by whites and Indians alike. Apess was particularly moved by the fact that these meetings were held not in a church but in the open air. “We had no house of divine worship, and believing ‘That the groves were God’s first temples,’ thither we would repair when the weather permitted. The Lord often met with us, and we were happy in spite of the devil.”¹⁰³

After being baptized in 1818 and receiving a “certificate of standing” to document his character and faith, Apess set out (as he so often did at transitional moments in his life) to visit his father. En route to Colrain, however, he lost his way in an unfamiliar woods: “I took the wrong road and was led into a swamp.”¹⁰⁴ He thought he could hear the sounds of other travelers, men and horse teams passing on the main road, but his attempts to get out only led further “into the labyrinth of darkness”: “At every step I became more and more entangled—the thickness of the branches above me shut out the little light afforded by the stars, and to my horror I found that the further I went the deeper the mire; at last I was brought to a dead stand. I had found it necessary to feel my way with a stick—now it failed in striking

100. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 70.

101. Ibid.

102. Ibid., 78.

103. Ibid., 84–85.

104. Ibid., 89–90.

on solid ground. . . . I was now amazed; what to do I knew not; shut out from the light of heaven—surrounded by appalling darkness . . . I could not call for assistance.”¹⁰⁵ Feeling it was as “dangerous . . . to go over” as to stay, Apess recalled this as “the hour of peril,” there being “no mortal ear to listen to my cry. I was shut out from the world, and did not know but that I should perish there, and my fate forever remain a mystery to my friends.”¹⁰⁶ From an indigenous perspective, this was as much a cultural as a religious crisis. When William Apess designated himself a “son of the forest,” he had virtually no personal experience of actually living in a forest. The places he knew best in New England were settled and cleared lands, and his travels had generally been confined to cart roads and well-worn paths rather than trails through the forest. Swamps and thick forests are places rich with resources, but Apess was so deeply unfamiliar with indigenous ecosystems that he could not make a shelter, could not find food, and, literally, could not find his way out of the woods. Hence, he was terrified. So he prayed: “I raised my heart in humble prayer and supplication to the father of mercies, and behold he stretched forth his hand and delivered me from this place of danger. . . . I found a small piece of solid earth, and then another, so that after much difficulty, I succeeded in once more placing my feet upon dry ground. I then fell upon my knees and thanked my blessed master for this singular interposition of his providence and mercy.”¹⁰⁷ His trial had not ended, however, since, upon reaching solid ground, he was afraid to proceed further. He finally tracked some light through the trees and reached his father’s house in Colrain just as the sun was coming up.

Apess’s work is full of metaphor and allusion, nowhere more so than when he describes his forest sojourns. As James Merrell notes, in American colonial writings it is crucial to distinguish landscape description from religious metaphor: “All this attention to wilderness and woods is inherited from the first colonists, particularly New Englanders imbued with biblical ideas about God’s chosen people passing through a wilderness to reach the promised land. . . . There are woods, and then there are *woods*.”¹⁰⁸ For Apess, woods were rarely places of safety; more often, they were fearful and mysterious places where one might encounter both beasts of the forest and dark nights of the soul. The Native American literary theorist Ron Welburn

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid., 91.

107. Ibid.

108. James Merrell, “Second Thoughts on Colonial Historians and American Indians,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (July 2012): 463–64.

suggests that for Apess, southern New England “swamps”—like those in Ledyard and Pokanoket—evoked tribal memories of places where Pequot, Narragansett, and Wampanoag warriors had met their doom in earlier colonial conflicts.¹⁰⁹ He also suggests that Apess might have been led into that Colrain swamp by supernatural forces, perhaps the “Little People” of southern Algonquian folklore.¹¹⁰ Had Apess been more familiar with Pequot tradition, he would have known how best to appeal to these other beings, these ancestral spirits who could have rescued him from danger. The sad fact is that Apess’s experiences with indigenous woods continually led him not to places of safety, but off the map (so to speak), away from the white societies he had become so skilled at navigating, and into unfamiliar indigenous homelands.

Once he finally reached Colrain, Apess says that he “found my father well, and all the family rejoiced to see me.” He does not specify the location of his father’s home, but he identifies him as a shoemaker. Fall was the busiest time of the year for that particular profession, and so, Apess reports, “I now agreed with my father to tarry with him all winter, and he agreed to learn me how to make shoes. In this new business I made some progress.”¹¹¹ Although Apess never tells us exactly why his father returned to Colrain, data from the U.S. Census report for 1820 offer a tantalizing clue: he may have started a new family. The senior William Apes (aged over forty-five) is listed there as head of a family of five, including three boys under the age of ten. All are identified as “Free White Persons,” and the household includes a woman between twenty-six and forty-five years of age.¹¹² Was this Apess’s birth mother? If so, one would think he might have mentioned it. Was it Candace Apes, or did she stay in Connecticut? Or was this the third wife noted by Avery? The woman’s identity is unclear, but apparently in Colrain, regardless of their ethnic origins, the entire Apess family was then perceived (at least by the census taker) as white.

Apess soon discovered his public voice as an exhorter at prayer meetings, saying, “While in Colreign the Lord moved upon my heart in a peculiarly

109. Welburn, “Son Lost in the Swamp,” 87.

110. Ibid., 98. Also see William S. Simmons, “The Mystic Voice: Pequot Folklore from the Seventeenth Century to the Present,” in Laurence M. Hauptman and James D. Wherry, eds., *The Pequots in Southern New England: The Fall and Rise of an American Indian Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 141–76.

111. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 94.

112. The census count for Colrain, in Franklin County, Mass., is in the Fourth Census of the United States, 1820 (NARA microfilm publication M33), Records of the Bureau of Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 57.

powerful manner, and by it I was led to believe that I was called to preach the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”¹¹³ At first, his father, a member of the Baptist church, was pleased. Apess recalls that he was encouraged by his “flesh and blood,” but he felt that he “was nothing but a poor ignorant Indian.” This provoked a personal identity crisis, even though the Apess family appears to have routinely danced across color lines, shifting their identities to adapt to their geo-social circumstances. Apess became increasingly distressed, and his dreams led him again into a swamp: “I dreamt one night that I was about taking a journey, that my road lay through a mirey place, in a dark and dreary way. It was with no little difficulty that I descended [*sic*] the steep. Then I beheld at some distance before me a large plain, on which the sun shone with perfect brightness, and when I succeeded in reaching this plain, all at once an angel of the blessed Lord stood in my way.”¹¹⁴ Shortly after this dream, a local friend arranged for a prayer meeting at his house, but he mistakenly “informed the people that there would be a sermon instead of an exhortation, and when I attended, instead of finding a few persons at my friend’s house, I found a large congregation assembled at the school-house.” It is possible that this was the new schoolhouse near Catamount Hill. Apess met with a mixed reception. At the second gathering in that location, “I was treated not with the greatest loving kindness, as one of them threw an old hat in my face, and this example was followed by others, who threw sticks at me.”¹¹⁵ He persevered regardless.

The novelty of an Indian preacher soon gained him some renown, and he was invited to preach before a large congregation in Greenfield. After that success, he “was assured that my call was of God,” but his father opposed him. Making matters worse, the local Methodist circuit rider explicitly forbade him to preach, but Apess was characteristically stubborn, explaining, “I could not sheath my sword, and having on the armour, I took the field.” When a new elder arrived and discovered Apess preaching, “what do you think he did? why, he placed me under censure. Now his name was M and he wanted me to confess that I was in error.”¹¹⁶ Apess refused to back down, so he left Colrain. In the 1829 edition of his autobiography, Apess expounded at some length on this dispute and others in the Methodist movement among different leaders and sects. In the 1831 edition, he

113. Apes, *A Son of the Forest* (1829), 95.

114. *Ibid.*, 96.

115. *Ibid.*, 97.

116. *Ibid.*, 98.

deleted much of that discussion, including references to specific individuals, probably because he knew that it could (if it had not already) come back to haunt him. Although he strove to make his own mark, he also greatly desired to be embraced by the Methodist community writ large.

In later years Apess would reflect that when Indians suffered from deprivation and scorn, it drove them farther apart; in contrast, Methodists' downtrodden status brought them closer. He mused: "Persecution seemed to cement the hearts of the brethren and sisters together, and their songs were sweet. Their prayers and exhortations were like arrows sticking in the heart of their King's enemy."¹¹⁷ Apess often cited biblical texts for comparative experiences that might shed light on the shared sufferings of the communities he identified with. In one powerful allusion, he found a metaphor that crossed cultures and continents. Speaking of Indians, he wrote: "The land of my fathers was gone; and their characters were not known as human beings but as beasts of prey. We were represented as having no souls to save, or to lose, but as partridges upon the mountains. All these degrading titles were heaped upon us."¹¹⁸ This text draws from 1 Samuel 26:20: "Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord: for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one does hunt a partridge in the mountains."¹¹⁹ Apess probably expected his audience to understand the biblical allusion, which characterizes a hunt so intense that immense effort would be expended in tracking a single partridge that "otherwise, from its insignificance, it would not be hunted."¹²⁰ During the early nineteenth century, however, the term *partridges* was also invoked to describe another imperiled group: Scottish patriots forced to flee their homelands in the aftermath of the Battle of Culloden, including the very Scots-Irish emigrants who had settled Colrain. In 1822, in *The Literary History of Galloway*, Thomas Murray described their fate: "they were hunted and sought after as a partridge on the mountain. . . . they may indeed be said to have lived under a continual sentence of death."¹²¹ A collection of Scottish sermons makes a similar inference, including a reference to having been forced to hold religious services in the open: "Look to those of our ancestors. . . .

117. *Ibid.*, 126.

118. Apess, *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians*, 119.

119. Charles John Ellicott, *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers*, vol. 2 (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1883), 410.

120. *Ibid.*

121. Thomas Murray, *The Literary History of Galloway* (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1822), 190.

When they were 'hunted like the partridge upon the mountain'; when their solemn meetings could be held only on the hill-side, or in the lonely glen; when their temple was nothing but the mossy sward below, and the wide canopy of heaven above."¹²² Here may be one of the few places, in print and in oratory, where Apess found common cause between the displaced indigenous peoples of New England and the Scots-Irish settlers of Colrain.

INDIGENOUS CHRISTIANS

On December 16, 1821, William Apess married Mary Wood, a white woman of mixed English and Spanish ancestry. The couple moved to Providence, Rhode Island, where William began preaching to mixed Native and African American audiences. In 1826 he received an exhorter's license from the Methodist Society in Providence, but several years would pass before he received a formal preacher's license.¹²³ Flush with the feeling that God had called on him, Apess began traveling, participating in the same Methodist circuit rider tradition that had been so successful for Indian ministers like Samson Occum a generation earlier. As part of his mission to convince white people to see Indians as Christian brothers and sisters, he shared the stories of racial degradation that would most shock his audience. Native lives, he said, were full of misery, and it was these deprivations, combined with racial persecution, that drove Indians even farther apart. The worst abuses, including those he had personally suffered at the hands of his Pequot relatives, were attributed (even in absentia) to white men, since they were the agents of alcoholism and land loss.

When Apess reclaimed Pequot space as an adult, he began collecting testimony from four female "Christian Indians," including his wife (whom he now classified among the Indians). In 1833 their narratives were published together with his as *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe; or, An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man*.¹²⁴ Some scholars have seen these narratives as evidence of Apess's attunement to Native women's rights, in part because he praises Sally George's skill as an exhorter, but each woman is portrayed not as a role model of indigenous feminine power but as an individual broken soul carried from the darkness of spiritual blindness into the light of Christian conversion. What links

122. James Watson, "The Blessings of the Sun of Righteousness," in *The Scottish Pulpit: Sermons by Eminent Scottish Divines*, vol. 4 (Glasgow: W. R. McPhun, 1839), 161.

123. Apess, *Son of the Forest* (1831), in *On Our Own Ground*, 48.

124. Apess, *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians*.

them together is not their culture or their gender, but their religion. By publishing his own autobiography three times—first as a book, then as an edited version, and then as a case study in this particular book—Apress may have intended to place himself not just among but at the head of this specific kin group of Christian Indian converts.¹²⁵ These were not, of course, the only women living at Pequot. The demographics of the time were such that, by the mid-1800s, Native women “had taken over the major political roles of the community” in the wake of so many Pequot men having departed for military and maritime occupations.¹²⁶ One is left to wonder whether Apress interacted with any of the Native female leaders who were not attracted to the spotlight of Methodism.

A counternarrative to Apress may be found among the Mohegans of Connecticut, who founded a Congregational church in 1831. In that case, three generations of Mohegan women—Lucy Occom Tantaquidgeon, her daughter Lucy Tantaquidgeon Teecomwas, and her granddaughter Cynthia Teecomwas Hoscott—deeded a half-acre plot on Mohegan Hill to settle this church.¹²⁷ This initiative, taking place just across the Thames River from the Pequot reservation, could not possibly have escaped Apress’s notice. Mohegan tribal members still traced familial links with Pequot people, but there appears to have been a crucial difference between Apress’s ministry and the Mohegans’. The Mohegan church emerged from and complemented indigenous forms of traditional leadership and worship; it still expressly integrates both Native and Christian beliefs. Apress apparently had a different goal in mind for his Christianized Pequots: he wanted existing churches to accept Native people without regard to their tribal origins. At no stage does he appear to have advocated for the revival of traditional indigenous religious practices. Instead, he suggested that people of all colors could find solace in a religious faith (specifically, an early nineteenth-century form of Methodism) that made all individuals equal in God’s eyes. In this regard, his role as a spokesperson for Native religious freedom is somewhat tenuous.¹²⁸

In 1833, while preaching in Wampanoag territory, Apress was drawn into

125. O’Connell, introduction to Apress, *On Our Own Ground*, lxvii.

126. Hauptman and Wherry, *The Pequots in Southern New England*, 127.

127. Melissa Jayne Fawcett, *The Lasting of the Mohegans: The Story of the Wolf People* (Uncasville, Conn.: Pequot Tribe, 1995): 22–27, 47–48.

128. David Carlson, *Sovereign Selves: American Indian Autobiography and the Law* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006). For further discussion of the links between Native American literature and identity, see Warrior, *The People and the Word*.

another forest, both literally and figuratively, when he became involved in a dispute over white men cutting wood on Mashpee Wampanoag tribal land. Drawn there perhaps by the presumed ethnicity of his paternal grandmother, he was initially welcomed as an advocate and spokesman. But, as he reports in *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Marshpee Tribe; or, The Pretended Riot Explained* (1835), there were conditions.¹²⁹ Some scholars have assumed that Apess became a full member of the Mashpee tribe,¹³⁰ but that would be an overly broad assumption about Wampanoag tribal membership and sovereignty. At the time, the Mashpees' tribal secretary, Daniel B. Amos, noted that Apess had not been granted tribal authority: "He has been adopted into the tribe, according to the Indian custom; and as long as he deserves our confidence, we shall regard him as a friend."¹³¹ In other words, while he supported the cause of Mashpee rights, Apess was welcome to reside among them, but he was still identified as Pequot and still considered an outsider; his Indian-ness conferred no special privilege. As Amos noted: "We know something of our rights without being told by Mr. Apes or any one. . . . If he does wrong, we shall oppose him as soon as any man."¹³²

In the midst of the Mashpee struggles, Apess encountered opposition from another quarter, having been targeted for slander by an itinerant minister, John Reynolds. Reynolds sent letters and published newspaper reports calling Apess a "deceiver and imposter" of "wicked and black character," and accusing him of "buying lottery tickets, and misappropriating monies collected . . . for building a meeting-house."¹³³ Seeking a defense, Apess turned to his Pequot relatives and his former neighbors in Groton, soliciting statements testifying to his character and standing. The Pequot signatories were Frederick Toby, Mary George, Lucy Orchard, and Margaret George (marked with an X and noted "By permission"), along with Lucretia George and William Apes (Apess's son); they all attested that they had allowed him

129. William Apess, *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Marshpee Tribe; or, The Pretended Riot Explained* (Boston: Jonathan Howe, 1835).

130. Gura, *The Life of William Apess, Pequot*, 100.

131. Statement by Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Secretary Daniel B. Amos, in Apess, *Indian Nullification*, 87.

132. Ibid.

133. Samuel Parker, attorney in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, indictment brought by William Apess against John Reynolds before the grand jury in Boston, 1832, transcribed in Apess, *Indian Nullification*, 121–23.

to collect funds “towards erecting a house to worship in,” with the expectation that he would deduct living expenses from the same account, “for himself and family, during the time he was employed in the agency, as we had no other means of making him any other remuneration.”¹³⁴ A second document confirmed that Apess had been selected to represent the “Pequot tribe” (more likely, this same group of signatories rather than the tribe as a whole) at the New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church in April 1830. A third document was signed by four white neighbors of the Pequots: Jonas Latham, Asa A. Gore, John Irish, and, interestingly, William M. Williams, Apess’s childhood master, who was now an overseer to the Pequots. These men attested that Apess “has acted honest and uprightly; and that he has done his duty to his Indian brethren. . . . And that he has duly made known his accounts, and appropriated the monies that was in contemplation for the Indian Meeting-house, for the Pequot tribe.”¹³⁵ These testimonies resolved the situation, to a degree, but Apess eventually lost favor at Mashpee for other reasons. A series of debt actions were lodged against him in the Barnstable Court of Common Pleas; one case, ironically, was a charge of trespass for taking timber from tribal lands.¹³⁶ In September 1836 Apess took out a mortgage for his house and goods, including his considerable library, and left Mashpee.¹³⁷ His parting comment on the entire Mashpee experience was deeply personal; he wrote, “Though an Indian, I am at least a man, with all the feelings proper to humanity, and my reputation is dear to me.”¹³⁸

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS AND OUT THE OTHER SIDE

Today Apess is often held up as an indigenous role model. Barry O’Connell identifies him as the most skilled Native American biographer, if not the first: “A Native American in command of all of the resources of the written language.”¹³⁹ Jack Forbes describes him as akin to “the great civil rights

134. This document was composed in the County of New London and submitted to William M. Williams, Justice of the Peace, on December 3, 1832. Pardon B. Braton signed as a witness. Transcribed in Apess, *Indian Nullification*, 126.

135. Apess, *Indian Nullification*, 127–28.

136. *Ezra Toby v. William Apes*, April 1837; *Enos Amos v. William Apes*, September 1837; *Phebe Ann Weden v. William Apes*, September 1836, all in Barnstable Court of Common Pleas, cited in Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827–1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 152–53.

137. Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations*, 153.

138. Apess, *Indian Nullification*, 274.

139. O’Connell, introduction to Apess, *On Our Own Ground*, xlii.

leaders,” the first Native American writer to “thoroughly identify the racism of Anglo-Americans and to see its universal application to all ‘people of color.’”¹⁴⁰ Jean O’Brien calls him a “remarkable figure” who “took the stage to reclaim New England as an Indian place.”¹⁴¹ There is no doubt that William Apess was a powerful orator and savvy social player. He cultivated an appearance that resisted the stereotype of illiterate Indians. Using eloquent language and metaphor, while borrowing freely from biblical texts and other historical works, he convincingly narrated scenes that illustrated the evils of discrimination and hypocrisy.¹⁴² He recounted examples of drunken, abused, or desperate Indians (including his former self) who stood as polar opposites to his later self. He testified to what it felt like to have lived through the fire and been lost in the wilderness before finding the way to enlightenment.

Apess very convincingly deployed what Robert Warrior calls the “rhetoric of ancientness and novelty,” promoting himself as the carrier of messages from deep indigenous traditions, even when he had little experience of those traditions.¹⁴³ He spoke about a precolonial ideal of a pristine Native life that had been irretrievably shattered by white colonial powers, and he delivered a trenchant critique of the erosion of indigenous sovereignty in ways that resonate with struggles still faced by Native peoples today. Apess drew on colonial legal discourse to develop his style of argumentation; he may have practiced this during his childhood indenture in the home (and law library) of Judge William Williams. In his final publication, *Eulogy on King Philip* (1836, 1837), Apess displayed his rhetorical skill by casting the wrongs of colonial warfare alongside the erasures of public memory, while advocating

140. Jack D. Forbes, “The Native Intellectual Tradition in Relation to Race, Gender and Class,” *Race, Gender & Class Journal* 3, no. 2 (1996): 15.

141. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, 190.

142. “Borrowing” from other writers was a common practice at the time, often done as a means to complement one’s own work by providing a reprint of relevant text (with or without attribution) under the same cover. So, for example, Apess’s historical “Appendix” to *Son of the Forest* (142–59) is essentially a word-for-word reprint of Washington Irving’s “Traits of Indian Character,” which first appeared in the February 1816 edition of the *Analectic* magazine. Elias Boudinot also reprinted Irving’s text (with permission) in *Star of the West; or, A Humble Attempt to Discover the Long Lost Ten Tribes of Israel* (Trenton, N.J.: D. Fenton, S. Hutchinson, and J. Dunham, 1816). Irving later republished the same text as a chapter in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* (New York: Van Winkle, 1820).

143. Robert Warrior, “William Apess: A Pequot and Methodist under the Sign of Modernity,” in David Batstone et al., eds., *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity, and the America* (New York: Routledge, 1977), 188–204.

for a revisionist rescripting of New England's commemorative traditions to recognize the Wampanoag leader Metacom ("King Philip") as a national hero on a par with George Washington.¹⁴⁴ His intent, he said, was to hold up a mirror (his literary "looking-glass") to whites, so that they might be awakened to their long history of wrongdoings. Yet Apess also curried favor with the same people he castigated.

Apess was very much a man of his time, having carefully situated himself among a self-selected cohort of African American and Native American authors who had embraced autobiographical writing as a means to interject their experiences and perspectives into Euro-American literature as a whole and into New England's print culture in particular. Writings about, and especially by, people of color captured the interest of American readers and began to circulate widely, in newspapers, pamphlets, and books. The success of these writings from the margins depended on three conditions: "an appreciation of the importance of one's experience; an interested, literate audience; and access to resources for printing and distribution."¹⁴⁵ Karim Tiro suggests that Apess became particularly adept at melding various modes of identity and representation to "articulate to a broad audience a critique of the dominant culture and a vindication of the indigenous one."¹⁴⁶ His performance depended heavily on displaying a believable level of both indigenous authenticity and religious fervor. As Carolyn Haynes notes, Apess's multiple performative identities were "mutually sustaining, interactive, and dialectic";¹⁴⁷ he was *both* Indian and Methodist, oppressed and empowered, white and nonwhite. If we follow the construction of identity proposed by Paul Gilroy, however, Apess was unabashedly Indian, employing the rhetoric of "cultural insiderism," to assert "an absolute sense of ethnic difference." This method, in the hands of a sufficiently convincing orator or writer, "acquires an incontestable priority over all other dimensions of their social and historical experience, cultures, and identities."¹⁴⁸ In this

144. William Apess, *The Eulogy on King Philip, as Pronounced at the Odeon, in Federal Street, Boston* (Boston: By the author, 1836).

145. Karim M. Tiro, "Denominated 'SAVAGE': Methodism, Writing, and Identity in the Works of William Apess, a Pequot," *American Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1996): 653.

146. *Ibid.*, 654.

147. Carolyn Haynes, "'A Mark for Them All to . . . Hiss At': The Formation of Methodist and Pequot Identity in the Conversion Narrative of William Apess," *Early American Literature* 31, no. 1 (1996): 26.

148. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.

regard, Apess was not *an* Indian; he was *the* Indian. Arnold Krupat offers another perspective, suggesting that Apess's Indian identity was so completely subsumed by his Christian faith and white culture that his written work constitutes, in effect, "the discursive equivalent of a glass trained on Heaven through which all this world must be seen."¹⁴⁹

With these and other perspectives in mind, I would suggest that Apess's looking glass was very carefully positioned *between* himself and his audience; only by seeing a very carefully constructed version of the "poor Indian" in him could his audiences be convinced of his authenticity. Apess was not, I suggest, "Indian" by experience; he was "Indian" by performance. During the course of his peripatetic life, although he claimed to be the son of the Indian forest, he appears to have been most at ease onstage. The cartography of his life experience, as laid out in his own conversion narrative, followed a track that enabled him both to experience and to escape various cultural markers of identity, and later to selectively draw on these to create a new persona. He appears to have been permanently marked by the troubles in Colchester, where he was broken by family abuse that could be more accurately described as lateral violence, of the sort typically enacted by oppressed individuals against one another. He was saved by Christian intervention that (not incidentally) inspired him to embrace elite white social and religious norms. The "William Apess" who spoke onstage was, I suggest, a performative role crafted to resolve his own inner wounds and identity fractures. By escaping the presumed "wildness" of Indian-ness and embracing the manners of whiteness, he found a way to be both Indian and white, victim and hero, soldier and peacemaker, sinner and seeker, indentured and free.

If we consider his use of other literary texts to recount Pequot history, he may have believed that the old ways were gone forever. For example, in the lengthy appendix to his autobiography, *A Son of the Forest*, Apess "borrowed" a long historical statement, word for word, from Elias Boudinot's *Star in the West* (1816) (which, in its turn, had been copied from Washington Irving's *Analectic* magazine).¹⁵⁰ This text, titled "Traits of Indian Character," castigates white colonists for having ruined Native peoples, reducing them to wandering "like vagrants through the settlements, among spacious [white] habitations replete with artificial comforts," while expelling them

149. Arnold Krupat, *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 142.

150. Apess appears to have copied this text from Boudinot, without attribution, but he might have also seen Irving's original. See footnote 142.

from the “forest, which once furnished them with ample means of subsistence.”¹⁵¹ According to Irving, prejudice surrounded Native people at every turn: “It has been the lot of the unfortunate aborigines of this country, to be doubly wronged by the white men—first, driven from their native soil by the sword of the invader, and then darkly slandered by the pen of the historian. The former has treated them like beasts of the forest; the latter has written volumes to justify him in his outrages.”¹⁵² The same text offered a glimpse of far better times, when Native communities were communal and hospitable, when “No roof then rose, but what was open to the houseless stranger; no smoke curled among the trees, but he was welcome to sit down by its fire, and join the hunter in his repast,” and when all shared in common so that none would starve.¹⁵³ Apess (parroting Bodinot’s version of Irving) then prophesied, however, that since Native people were now being “hunted like wild beasts about the earth,” memories of them would survive only in “the romantic dreams of the poet, to populate in imagination his glades and groves, like the fauns, and satyrs, and sylvan deities of antiquity.”¹⁵⁴ It is tragically ironic that Apess used the words of a white elite writer to evoke both the warmth of indigenous communities and their (supposedly inevitable) disappearance.

And so it is that indigenous landscapes of mountains, swamps, and forest groves appear in William Apess’s writings like recurring pauses, stopovers amid his wanderings, places he was as eager to leave as to enter. Perhaps he feared the forest, after having been left adrift by his absent Native mother and abused by his grandparents. Perhaps his military experiences drew him toward male exercises of power. Perhaps the flowing speech of the Methodists was more alluring than the campfires in the forest. This much is clear: Apess’s most reliable relative was his father, a man who resisted conformity and eluded easy characterizations by being both white and Indian, devout and distant, present and absent. His father made a home not on the Pequot reservation, and not with the Brotherton community, but in the hills of Colrain. As Ammon Davenport later recalled, Colrain was a place where “it makes my heart young again to return to the familiar scenes of my youth, and look once more upon the majestic outlines and changing views of this mountain scenery, for all these old and familiar hills seem blended with all the early impressions of those happy boyhood days.”¹⁵⁵ Perhaps this was as

151. Apes, *Son of the Forest* (1829), 140–41.

152. Ibid.

153. Ibid.

154. Ibid., 160.

155. Davenport, “Some Reminiscences of a Barefoot Boy,” 90.

close as Apess's father could get to precolonial ideals of communal indigenous lifeways. The evidence suggests that, during the nineteenth century, Colrain was a hybrid community where one could be white *and* Indian *and* free, in large part because every house was small, everyone was self-reliant, and all farmers were equal.

Today on Catamount Hill there is virtually no trace of the homes and farms that existed in Apess's time; only a few ancient trees and broken foundations remain. The clearings have grown up to forest; the swamps have been drained. Down by the rivers, the center of Colrain is no longer bustling with mills; it is a small, sleepy hill town, culturally and geographically remote from the educated urbanity of the middle Connecticut River Valley.¹⁵⁶ In so many places like this across New England, the experiences of Native Americans and African Americans have been rendered invisible by the narratives of colonization, the striving toward modernity, the valorization of the rich and famous, and the passing of time. The "pen of the historian" paints a bloody picture of the conflicts of 1637 and 1675–76, when the Pequots and Wampanoags of southern New England were nearly destroyed, but those nations survived. In 1735 the signers of the Sokoki deeds hoped that white and Indian might peacefully coexist in indigenous homelands, but the savagery of the French and Indian Wars made that impossible. When the Brotherton Indians headed westward, in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, it might have appeared to be a widespread diaspora, but that group represented only a fraction of the Native nations of New England. Religion, removal, and relocation were not the only options. The details of the Apess family's story suggest other strategies for survival, such as a melding of white-black-Indian relations that might, at least in some locales, enable survivors of those earlier conflicts to find ways to live as kin side by side.¹⁵⁷

156. This history is hidden in part because of dramatic shifts in the demography of the hill towns. In the 2010 federal census, the population of Colrain stood at only 1,671, less than the 1,961 counted in 1820. See "Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010 Demographic Profile Data (DP-1): Colrain town, Franklin County, Massachusetts," U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

157. There are memories of these complicated kin relations in the hill towns and valleys of New England even today. On the evening of June 11, 2015, I was seated among an audience of Colrain residents who turned out to hear Drew Lopenzina discuss William Apess's origins and history. The white-haired elders of the town listened with quiet attentiveness as he shared the story of the famous Indian who had lived alongside their predecessors. There, in that largely white (and still largely Scots-Irish) hill town, several elderly people quietly shared stories of other families

When all was said and done, where was William Apess's promised land, where a transcultural Indian could thrive? Did he long to minister to the Mohawks in the forests of Canada? Did he dream of the whitewashed, wood-frame church he hoped to build on the Pequot reservation? Was his heart filled by the bustle of New York City, where he spent his final days? Or did he glimpse, through the dappled light in the maple groves atop the mountain, a forgotten place of refuge, in a clearing in the forests of Colrain?

in town who were known to have had "Indian blood." "Of course," they said, "everybody knew, but nobody talked."